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ABSTRACT

Educational goals state broadly and in long-range terms what it is hoped the educational process will achieve, but not how those goals are to be achieved. Goals are preferably set before educational needs are assessed. Goal setting is most effective when ten suggestions are followed: (1) identify and analyze strengths and weaknesses: (2) involve a cross section of people: (3) consider the needs and interests of all: (4) avoid manipulating people: (5) establish a base of confidence: (6) work to achieve and maintain credibility: (7) remember that goals should be understandable, significant, realistic, relevant, and attainable: (8) consider proposed goals as tentative until verified by needs assessment: (9) utilize the proposed goals and people involved to move into the next phase of the planning process: and (10) keep the community informed. Goal setting is ideally overseen by a committee appointed by the board of education. (Author/PGD)

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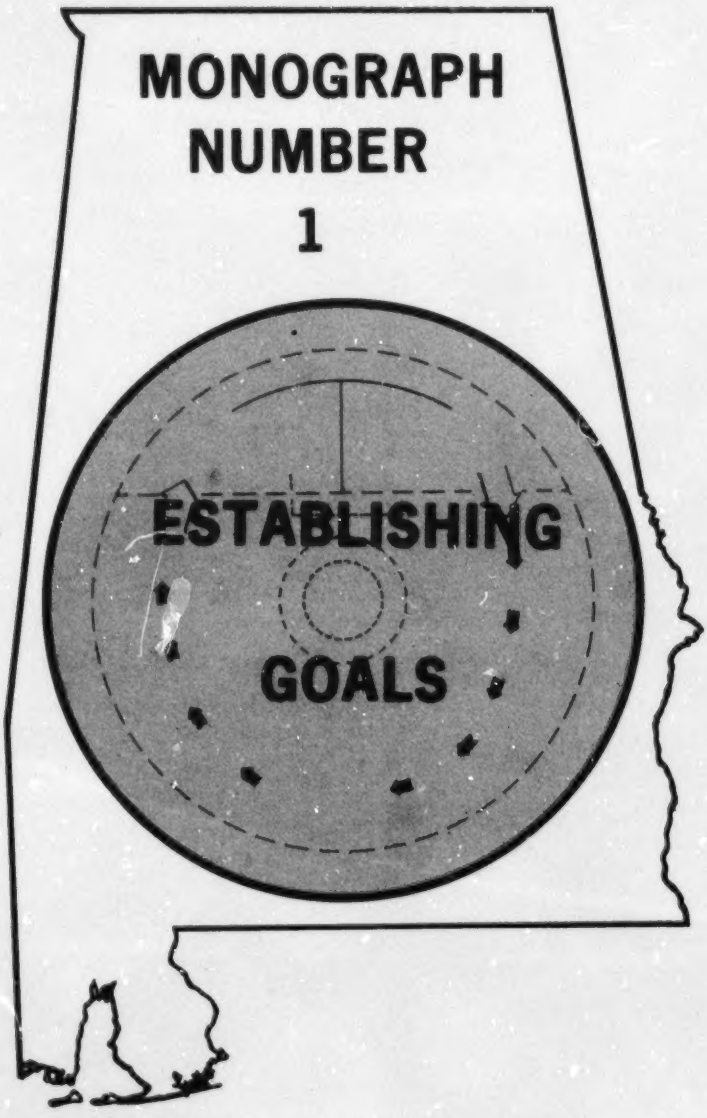

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SYSTEMATIC PLANNING SERIES
FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

MONOGRAPH NUMBER 1

ESTABLISHING GOALS

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AUG 7 1980

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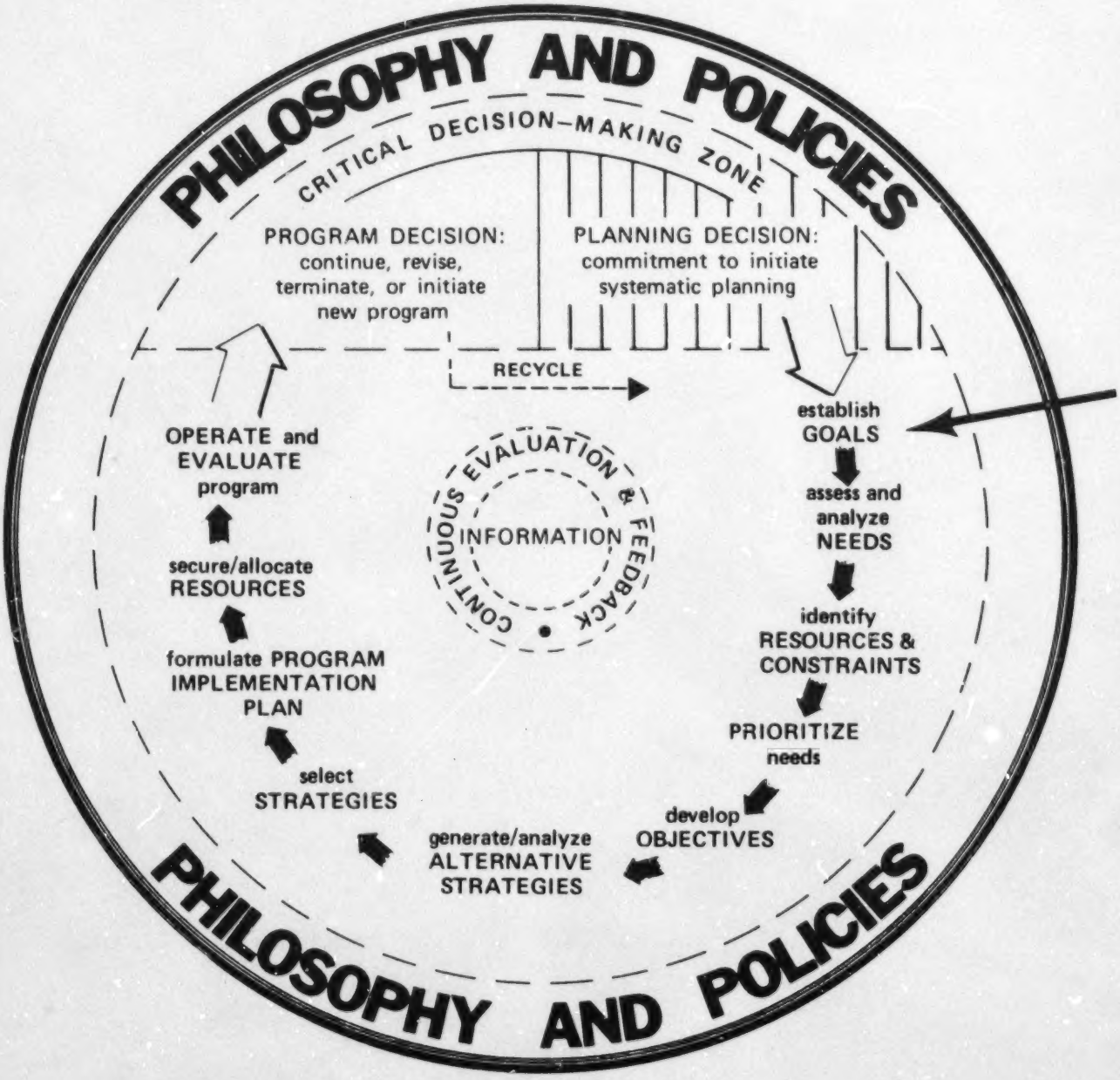

A PLANNING CYCLE

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ESTABLISHING GOALS

A goal is a statement of broad, general intent. It is often long-range, difficult to measure and somewhat timeless. Goals describe ultimate results or outcomes; in short, they are ends toward which effort is directed. They are perceptions of ideals and, as such, focus on desired changes. A goal raises the important question, what can we achieve as an optiumum future? It should not contain methodology (solutions, strategies, steps, etc.) It is a clear statement of WHAT we hope to achieve, not HOW it will be done. How is important, but that question will be considered later in the planning cycle.

Considerable confusion exists even among educators concerning the relationship and differences between **goals** and **objectives**. The terms are similar in that both describe a desired condition to be attained, but there are some basic differences which must be recognized. Writers and speakers sometimes compound the problem by using the terms as if they were synonymous. Although objectives are defined and discussed in more detail in monograph number four, the reader should at least understand at this early stage of the planning cycle that a **goal** and an **objective** are not the same, and that distinctions between them are related mainly to dimensions of specificity, accountability, and time (See Figure I for Examples.)

The establishment of goals is an extremely important element in the planning process. It can be accomplished prior to needs assessment as suggested in the planning cycle, in conjunction with it, or after needs assessment. If goals are established before or concurrently with needs assessment, the goals are more likely to be comprehensive. If they are developed after the needs assessment has been completed, which is not recommended, they tend to be narrower in scope and more problem-oriented.

Before engaging in a formal goal setting procedure, a decision must be made relative to: (1) who will be involved, and (2) what procedure will be most effective. Obviously, there are a number of approaches to the goal development process, but basically a decision must be made to have either limited involvement or wide participation and to have participants either generate the goals or select goals from a predetermined list. Incorporated in the following summary of suggestions for deriving educational goals is the strong recommendation that wide invovlement and participant input be given serious consideration throughout this crucial activity.

Past experience should make us painfully aware that educators, especially administrators, all too often have based decisions upon their perceptions of what the schools should be trying to accomplish. Traditionally, educators have failed to listen to parents very often and student opinions have been almost totally ignored.

Figure I

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Are similar in that both describe
a desired conditon to be attained,
THERE ARE BASIC DIFFERENCES, however,
which must be considered.

GOAL DEFINITION	OBJECTIVE DEFINITION
Statement of Broad General Intent Usually long-range Difficult to Measure Timeless Describes ultimate results Perception of an Ideal	Precise description of observable and measurable changes in performance Describes immediate results Usually relatively short-range Specifies completion time Target for action
GOAL STATEMENT	**OBJECTIVE STATEMENT**
"To improve the skills in solving fractions of all fifth grade students."	"To improve the skills in solving fractions of all fifth grade students so that when given a standardized fifth grade arithmetic test consisting of twenty problems on fractions, all students will correctly answer at least fifteen."

Suggestions for Deriving Educational Goals

1. **Identify and analyze strengths and weaknesses.** The issues, concerns, complaints, criticisms, positive comments – in general all available information, knowledge, and perceptions should be considered when initiating the goal setting process.

2. **Involve a cross section of people.** The temptation is great for the board of education, superintendent, or a few other educational leaders to set goals and expect everyone to accept them and work diligently for their attainment. True, it is time consuming to involve a large number of people, but involvement is a critical factor in establishing and achieving goals. People are more likely to work together and support action necessary to accomplish goals when they have had a part in determining them. Furthermore, if there is to be any reasonable degree of success in attaining goals, they must have general acceptance within the community and school system.

   A goal was defined earlier as a perception of an ideal. The crucial question here is whose perception? Should goals be determined by a few educators and imposed upon others, or should the perceptions be representative of the total community?

3. **The needs and interests of all should be considered.** We often become impatient with a process that may take months to plan, organize and carry out, especially when most educators feel that they already know what the goals should be and in most cases could develop an acceptable set of goals in a relatively short time. It is important to remember, however, that the people who must provide the resources and support as well as those who are responsible for designing and implementing programs to attain the goals should understand and be involved in setting the goals toward which their efforts will be directed. Educators are not infallible and don't always know all of the needs and interests of students. What educator would assume that he always knows what is best for everyone?

4. **Avoid manipulating people.** In organizing committees, holding open meetings, conducting surveys, etc., it is imperative that input, as emphasized earlier, be received from a representative group. There is a tendency to exclude or surpress known critics because we don't like to hear what they have to say, but it is important that everyone have a reasonable opportunity to be heard. This does not imply domination or control by the highly vocal, disgruntled few. It does mean that educators must be willing to listen and to accept criticism and

suggestions in an open manner with a firm, genuine commitment to consider all viewpoints in order to reach decisions that are ultimately fair and in the best interest of students. Furthermore, this approach demands that students, teachers, parents, and other interested citizens have a part in determining educational goals. Dissatisfaction and unwarranted criticism are usually the result of misunderstanding. Once the critics have an opportunity to become involved, to receive honest answers to their queries, and to gain insight into some of the problems and conditions, they will frequently become strong, active supporters of the educational program. Involving people and securing their support for needed changes and improvements is a major role of the educational leader. It is an essential ingredient of progress and success.

Manipulation of people is dangerous and ill advised. This practice may even border on the dishonest and unethical. Belaboring this point is hardly necessary because one thing is certain. The moment people sense that the outcomes of meetings (deliberations of task forces, advisory groups, committees, etc.) are pre-determined by administrators who exercise unrelenting control over them, they will quickly lose their effectiveness. In fact, when it becomes obvious that the "deck has been stacked," so to speak, feelings of distrust, doubt, and lack of confidence will begin to permeate all activities. In an atmosphere of this nature, conditons militate against any constructive accomplishment and progress is severly impeded. Moreover, it is painfully evident that a situation such as this becomes infectious, breeding negative attitudes and causing withdrawal of support.

5. **Establish a base of confidence.** People must have confidence in the system and in those who administer the educational program. They must feel that the system is open in respect to both input and output. Provisions must be made for members of the community to interact with educators. Lines of communication must be kept open. Administrators who demonstrate that they are approachable, available, interested, sincere, fair, concerned, and capable are likely to operate from a strong base of confidence.

6. **Work to achieve and maintain credibility.** Closely related to the previous suggestion is credibility, which must be high if goal setting efforts are to be productive. This requires that the educator be honest and above board with people. An atmosphere of trust must prevail. If areas of weakness are identified, these findings should be made known. If problems develop, people should be given valid information promptly. Informed people invoived in setting goals and considering needs are the best hope for finding the means of attaining the goals. Those who help set the goals are usually committed to work toward their accomplishment, and they can be highly effective in convincing others of needs and securing their support. Shortcomings and

weaknesses are no longer **YOURS**, they become **OURS** and **WE** usually can accomplish more than I can.

7. **Goals should be understandable, significant, realistic, relevant, and attainable.** Initially, this appears to be an imposing, if not impossible, expectation. However, upon closer examination, it is nothing more than a rather "common sense" approach. Goals should be stated simply and clearly. Educators should remember that the people in the community are generally unimpressed, suspicious, and even confused by statements that are replete with educational jargon. Resist the temptation to obscure goals in "educatorese." See that they are stated in terms that assure understanding of what the schools are trying to accomplish.

   In addition to being understandable, goals should be significant. If the goals established deal with trivial, unimportant matters, it is unlikely that anyone will exhibit much interest in or enthusiasm for them. It is not necessary to cite the serious problems that failure here can precipitate.

   Equally important in setting goals is consideration of how realistic they are. People must be able to accept the purpose contained in the goal statement as a reasonable attempt to improve some phase of education about which they are concerned. To satisfy the "realistic" test, goals must be rational, feasible, believable, and appropriate.

   The relevance of goals, in the overall scheme of things, must be clearly discernable to those expected to work for their accomplishment. It is important for people to identify readily with goals as statements representating consensus opinion relative to the way things ought to be. Goal statements should reflect peoples' perceptions about the important aspects of education, and at the same time, relate their concerns to realistic expectations.

8. **Proposed goals and their order of priority should be considered tentative until they are verified by factual information collected in the needs assessment.** After additional information is available from needs assessment, goals should be re-examined, evaluated, and revised if necessary. Frequently, people have formed opinions or perceptions of the schools based upon invalid information. Initial goal statements could easily reflect these erroneous, preconceived ideas. For example, members of the community may have read in a local newspaper that eighth grade students in the state are reading, on the average, two years below grade level. Suppose, however, that a month later, results of a standardized reading test administered as part of a needs assessment in the local schools showed that the average reading level of eighth grade students was one month above the national average. If one of the goals, based

upon concern growing out of the newspaper article, had been to raise the average reading level of eighth students to the national average, the additional information provided in the needs assessment would have resulted in re-consideration and revision of the original goal.

Frequently, goal setting can be combined with the needs assessment phase of the planning cycle since it is logical and quite natural to compare future aspirations (GOALS - what should be - desired conditions) with the current situation (determined by NEEDS ASSESSMENT - what is - existing conditions). Although goal setting and information gathering, which is part of a needs assessment, may be performed concurrently or consecutively, from a practical standpoint, they may be considered concurrent functions.

9. **Don't stop when goals have been written, approved and adopted.** This is the beginning, not the end. Utilize the goals and people involved to move into the next phase of the planning process and eventually effect needed changes. Consider forming a citizens' Task Force, Steering Committee, Advisory Council or some other appropriate representative group to work closely with the school system to follow progress and determine how well its programs are meeting the established goals. The role of any such group should be clarified before its formation. There should be a definite understanding that these are advisory groups. They are not policy-making bodies and are not to "meddle" in administrative affairs or decisions. They should review, evaluate, and recommend revision of goals, programs, etc. as conditions change. Members of a task force should actively seek involvement and community support for programs designed to achieve the important goals of the system.

10. **Keep the community informed relative to goals and progress toward their attainment.** Educational leaders and boards of education have a responsibility to let the community know what goals have been established (what should be), the results of needs assessment (what is), the needs (discrepancy between what should be and what is), and what needs to be done (programs) to accomplish the goals and alleviate or eliminate the needs. An advisory committee could help keep the community informed. Progress, or lack of it, should be reported regularly and should be publicized in such a manner that all interested persons would be aware of the strengths and weaknesses and efforts being made to improve the school system.

How to Begin

At this point the most immediate questions are: What is the best way to develop goal statements for my school system? How do we get started? How do we organize to do this job? Who should be involved? What resources will be needed? etc. Obviously the answers to those questions will vary from one school system to another. The best way for your school system is the way that will get the job done most effectively and efficiently. School districts across the country have used a variety of techniques successfully. Some of these such as Phi Delta Kappa, Q Sort, Delphi, brainstorming, surveys, interviews, etc. are described in the literature. You may be able to adopt or adapt one of these or you may find it best to synthesize or develop your own method.

In any event the active support and involvement of the superintendent and the board of education are necessary. If these are lacking, drop the whole idea immediately. Goals should be developed in the name of, and, ultimately adopted by the board.

Upon the recommendation of the superintendent the board should officially appoint a goals committee. The role and responsibilities of the committee should be clearly defined and communicated to committee members in writing by the board and the superintendent. This should be discussed and clarified at the first meeting. The committee must be given the support and the resources to carry out its job. In addition to that, someone must be given the responsibility to coordinate the work of the committee. Good leadership is essential to success.

During the organizational phase the committee should discuss ways and means to accomplish its job. Special conditions and/or constraints affecting the committee's work should be identified and analyzed. A competent person should be appointed to research the field and compile information for the committee relative to successful techniques for goal development. This should include samples of goal statements.

After careful consideration of all factors the committee should develop an action plan which specifies activities, task assignments, time lines and financial and human resources. Once the work has been planned, it then becomes a matter of following the plan to job completion. Committee members may have the time and expertise to carry out the work or it may be desirable to bring in consultants from outside the school system to perform certain functions.